

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 410 719

EC 305 773

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TITLE Petroglyphs: The Writing on the Wall.

INSTITUTION New Hampshire Univ., Durham. Inst. on Disability.

SPONS AGENCY Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (ED), Washington, DC.

PUB DATE 1996-00-00

NOTE 48p.

CONTRACT H158A1003-91; H086J50014-95

PUB TYPE Books (010) -- Opinion Papers (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.

DESCRIPTORS *Academic Achievement; *Access to Education; Curriculum Development; Daily Living Skills; *Disabilities; Friendship; High Schools; *Inclusive Schools; Mainstreaming; *Peer Acceptance; Photographs; Photojournalism; *Social Integration

IDENTIFIERS Academic Accommodations (Disabilities)

ABSTRACT

This book is a collection of photographs and accompanying text that focuses on the inclusion of high school students with disabilities in general education classrooms in New Hampshire. For each topic, a black-and-white picture is presented of a student with a disability in a general education setting. The opposing page has a paragraph on what people used to think about students with disabilities, paired with a paragraph on what people now know about students with disabilities. Topics include: academics, curriculum, natural supports, life skills, community, friendship, work, graduation, restructuring, future planning, and respect. The text stresses the need to change society's beliefs about the limitations and segregation of high school students with disabilities and to make the accommodations necessary to include these students in general education. (CR)

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glyphs:

the writing on the wall

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petrogly

"The Turning Points Project: New Hampshire's Transition Initiative" and "New Hampshire's Statewide Systems Change Project" are five year projects funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (Grant No.'s H158A1003-91 and H086J50014-95), awarded to the New Hampshire Department of Education, in conjunction with the University of New Hampshire's Institute on Disability/UAP. The contents of this book do not necessarily represent the policy or position of the U.S. Department of Education.

petroglyphs:

the writing on the wall

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1996

petroglyphs:
the writing
on the wall is a collection of photographs
paired with uncompromising narrative. Like a
carving on a rock, each picture communicates
many layers of thinking with a single image. The
accompanying words are additional placeholders
for our thoughts, and carry both an affirmation and
a warning. An affirmation that as we learn so can
we change, and a warning that without change
regression is inevitable. This book may not be easy
to read. It has hard edges and sits close to the fault
line. But there is a bottom line. Social justice must
be extended to high school.

introduced

Although inclusive education has taken a strong hold in schools throughout the country, high school students with disabilities still face the real and frightening possibility of segregation. We used to accept this. We used to think that high schools could not embody both excellence and equity. But we now know better. By challenging existing beliefs and practices, this book advocates change. Change that disturbs the universe of special education. Change that goes beyond a revelation to become part of a revolution. Change that is more than a nodding of the head.

Frederick Douglass once wrote, "People who advocate freedom, yet deprecate agitation, are people who want crops without plowing the ground." It's time to turn the soil. Douglass continued, "Without struggle, there is no progress." This book honors the struggle in all of us. The struggle to embrace our old thinking for a moment, learn from it, and then push it aside. With confidence. For the writing is on the wall.

ON



academics

We used
to think students with disabilities couldn't
learn academics in regular high school classes. That
functional-daily-living-skills were more important
than reading and writing and math. That cooking
skills were more important than knowledge.
So we taught students to read safety words while
their peers were reading books. We took students
to the bowling alley while their classmates studied
physics. We equated not being able to read
Shakespeare, with not being able to appreciate it.
Not being able to raise your hand in class, with
having nothing to say.

We now
know seven of the most dangerous words
in our vocabulary are "she won't get anything out of
it." We now know students with disabilities can
learn academic skills. And that it's advantageous to
do so. We now know literacy is probably the most
functional skill in our society. And there is great value
in knowledge. We now know about the "least
dangerous assumption." So when we aren't sure
whether or not a student understands, we must
assume that she does. We now know the high price
of assuming she does not.

We used
to think if a student wasn't able to open
a biology book and answer the questions on page
seventy-two, that the student would be better off in
a special education classroom. But then we learned
about the importance of inclusion. And so, when the
teacher said turn to page seventy-two, we no
longer asked that student to leave. Instead, we
handed her something else to do—something “on
her level.” And we called on a special education
teacher to create it. And we called on a
paraprofessional to implement it. But the student
never got called on, because the biology teacher
didn't know what the student was doing.

We now
know we can do better. That it is possible
for students with disabilities to learn from the regular
education curriculum. That the barrier to this
happening isn't the student's ability, but often it is
our own. We know “no man is an island,” but
without modifications and supports, sometimes
students with disabilities in regular classrooms can
be. We now know the difference between
alternative and modified. That “being in” isn't the
same thing as “being with.” And that ultimately we
need to stop talking about curriculum modification
and start talking about inclusive curriculum design.

curriculum





natural supports

We used
to think students with disabilities didn't
need guidance counselors. Or lockers, or notebooks,
or an excuse for being late to class. We used to think
students with disabilities couldn't be sent to the
principal's office. Didn't need transcripts. Couldn't
make the team. When students needed to practice
communication skills we sent them to the speech
room—we forgot about the cafeteria. When
students got sick, the special education teacher
called home—we forgot about the school nurse.
And when classmates were getting homework
assignments, we forgot to give students with
disabilities anything at all.

We now
know about natural supports. And that
“only as special as necessary” are words to live by.
We now know about the people, places, and things
that support all high school students. So instead of
“checking in” each morning to the special education
room, students check into homeroom. Instead of
aides being assigned to students, instructional
assistants are assigned to classrooms. And instead of
IEP progress notes, all students get report cards.
We now know that including students without
natural supports just moves the self-contained
classroom into regular education. It only changes
the place where supports are provided. Not the
way. Not the who. Not the how.

We used
to think making a bed, change for a
dollar, and a grilled cheese sandwich were
important skills for students with disabilities to learn
during high school. That achieving these skills would
lead to a full—and fulfilling—life. Of course, we
had heard about inclusion. Of course, we had heard
stories of students learning academics, gaining
friendships, and trying out for the school play. It
sounded great. It sounded wonderful. But it
sounded like something was missing. When did
these students learn functional skills?

We now
know when—and how—students with
disabilities can learn functional skills during a typical
high school day. We now know money skills can be
taught in math class, the cafeteria, and the school
store. That cooking can be learned in culinary arts.
And let's face it, just how important is "bed-making"
anyway? At the same time, we realize these things
are not enough. That learning to work in a group,
solve a problem, and ask for help are essential skills
for all people in the real world. At home. Around
town. On the job. And these things are taught in
regular education classes. Everyday. To all students.

life skills





community

We used
to think it was a good idea for students
with disabilities to spend a portion of their day out in
the community separated from their peers. We used
to think they needed "the exposure." We used to
think when students left school in the middle of the
day, they didn't really miss anything. And if it's true
actions speak louder than words, then it can be said
we thought going to the mall was more important
than going to class. It's as if we thought once a
student had the skills to eat in a restaurant, buy a bus
ticket, and cross the street, something magical would
happen. We used to think only students with
disabilities needed to learn in the community. But
then students without disabilities began leaving
school during the day. And we wondered what they
were doing.

We now
know community-based-instruction is not
the same as community service. Job shadowing isn't
an internship. And walking the mall is walking the
mall. We now know that community-based-
instruction is rooted in the notion that—in the name
of skill acquisition—it's okay to separate students
with disabilities from their peers. (Didn't we used to
call that segregation?) We still recognize that some
skills need to be learned outside of the school
building. But we now know this can happen at times
when all students are out of school. For there are
still too many students who can eat in a restaurant
but have no one to eat with. Too many students
who are buying vowels instead of bus tickets.

We used
to think being included from seven-thirty
until two was enough. That a full day of classes
equaled a full life. We thought if students were well
supported during the school day, we had done our
job. Yes, there were stories of students sitting in front
of the television everyday after school. Yes, parents
asked for ideas, names, and activities. And yes, we
were concerned. But what could we do? After-
school was not our responsibility. Surely there was
an agency that could help.

We now
know life does not end after the last bell.
That all students need to be supported to have full
after-school lives. That clubs, sports, teams, and just
"hanging out" matter as much as classes. And sure,
we still struggle to get students the right after-school
supports. In the right places. At the right times. And
it's not always easy to find that ride home. And we
still worry about the limits of our responsibility. But
we're talking about people's lives, so can we really
just say, "It's not my job?"

after-school





friendship

We used
to think friendships for students with
disabilities couldn't happen. That it was too hard.
That the only way to get people involved was to
pay them. We used to think peer support was
friendship. And that it was okay if the aide was
the student's "best friend." We used to think
having people say "hello" in the hallways was
enough. And that we were working on friendship
if socialization goals were written on the IEP.
As if maintaining eye contact could fill a
Saturday night.

We now
know we were right about friendships
being hard work, but wrong to think they couldn't
happen. We now acknowledge what we should have
known all along—students absolutely must
share time and space. There is no other way.
We have learned this from students who tell us
they are lonely. We have learned this from parents
who would trade all of their child's therapy units
for a single phone call. And, as hard as it is to hear,
we have learned this from classmates who tell us
that adults often stand in the way—literally—of real
friendships happening. Their advice: take a step
back, don't force it, trust us.

We used
to think high school students with disabilities needed to learn prevocational skills. That sorting forks from spoons, nuts from bolts, and red from yellow would lead to gainful employment. But how many jobs are there sorting nuts and bolts? We used to tell students they had plenty of jobs to choose from. (As if working with food, cleaning supplies, and plants was choice enough.) And that they needed job coaches by their sides. Because employers didn't have the training. Or the time. We used to think going to work was more important than going to class. That a student couldn't learn job skills in school. And that filling a soda machine was more important than geography.

We now
know the best kind of job training for any student is a well-rounded education. That students with disabilities shouldn't have to choose between classes and work. That real jobs happen after and beyond school. And involve a paycheck at the end of the week. We now know the best person to teach the job is a person who knows the job—a co-worker. Because the job coach has never worked in a bank, or a record store, or a law office. We now know that being on time, working with others, and organizing materials are skills for work as well as school. That they can be learned in regular classes. And that prevocational training only gets a student ready to get ready to get ready to get ready...

work





Photograph by Mark Lawrence

graduation

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We used
to think students with disabilities didn't
need to graduate. We used to think that getting a
diploma didn't matter. Caps, gowns, photographs,
and graduation parties—well, those things just
weren't very important. And not only did we
believe that students shouldn't graduate, we thought
students should come back to school after their
senior year. And the year after that. And sometimes
even longer. It was an entitlement, so we did it.
And afterwards, students went through the
graduation ceremony with a class they didn't know.
We used to think that made sense.

We now
know graduation is one of the only
remaining "rites of passage" for most young people
in our country. And that it does matter. We learned
this when a high school "graduate" had to get his
GED in order to go to college. We learned this
when a student confessed it was embarrassing
to be a third year senior. We learned this when
the bus stopped coming the day after a student's
21st birthday. We now know that students with
disabilities should graduate. That some students may
need continued school district support. And that we
have both the power and the responsibility to figure
out a way for one not to cancel out the other.
Students cannot be held hostage to policy that lags
behind practice.

We used
to think we needed to make schools
better. We still think that, and we probably always
will. But we used to think schools could get better
without being better for all students. That when we
improved education for students without disabilities,
we had improved education. We used to think
ninety percent of the student population was the
whole school. Or close enough. And though we
never dared to say it aloud, we secretly questioned
whether it was even possible to design a school that
met the needs of all students. Therefore, it wasn't
even our goal.

We now
know equity and excellence are both
possible. That they are partners when educational
reform is meaningful, sustainable, and real. In fact,
without equity there can be no true excellence. We
now know we need to include everyone in school
reform. Parents. Students. With and without
disabilities. But we also know we can't wait for
schools to be perfect before students with disabilities
are included. (Can a school be perfect if not
everyone belongs?) We now understand inclusion is
not a guarantee for a flawless education—it's an
assurance of a typical one. Isn't that only fair?

restructuring

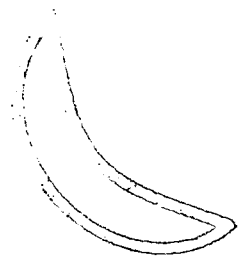




future planning

We used
to think getting a student "into" a job was
supporting her to plan for her future. That aptitude
tests and vocational assessments would tell us
everything we needed to know. And if the student
wasn't successful, well, we did our best. But we
forgot to ask students what they wanted to study.
We forgot to ask students where they wanted to
work. And sometimes we even forgot to ask students
to attend and direct the meetings where all of these
decisions were being made.

We now
know that nobody has the right to plan
somebody else's future. So we've stopped telling
students what they should be. We've stopped telling
students what they can't be. And we have started
listening to what students want to be. We now
know work is just one of many options for a new
high school graduate. That college is a possibility
for everyone. That passions and interests are just as
important as skills and abilities. And "being realistic"
often results in shattered dreams.



We used
to think disabilities were bigger than
people. That students' days were best filled with
what someone said they couldn't-wouldn't-shouldn't
do. So we pulled students out of English class to
do physical therapy. Out of math to work on speech.
Out of lunch to learn social skills in a restaurant.
And although it's difficult to admit, we often
believed that a student with disabilities was in need
of repair. So if we could remediate the disability, we
could help the student learn more. Live more.
Become a better person.

We now
know students with disabilities are not
broken. That unlike automobiles, people don't need
to be fixed. We now see past a student's label and
learn the student's name. Past the IQ score to find
the student's talent. We now know people are
people. (Scary to think that this is something new.)
And so we talk with students, not about them. We
work with students, not on them. We plan with
students, not for them. We follow, not lead. Ask,
not tell. Respect, not change.

respect





We used to think

inclusion was a good idea for little kids, but it couldn't work in high school.

That professionals wouldn't make it work.





That high school students would be too cruel.

We now know

high school inclusion can happen.





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Is happening.

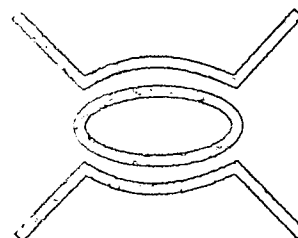
And continues to get better.





Courtesy of Souhegan High School

(The end,
or maybe just the beginning.)



The creation
of this book would not have been possible if not for the support, dedication, and flexibility of a great number of people. We want to thank the staff, faculty, families, and students from the following schools for welcoming us into their schools: Timberlane High School; Souhegan High School; Portsmouth High School; Concord High School; Salem High School; Somersworth High School; Spaulding High School; Dover High School; Raymond High School; and, Pelham High School. We also want to thank Stella Hogan, owner of A Wig Center, Concord, NH.

We thank the students, families, and schools who gave us permission to take photographs that we

acknowledge

were not able to use in this book. There are far more stories than there are pages in the book.

We are grateful to our colleagues throughout the country who share our commitment to true high school inclusion and restructuring. While they are far too numerous to list, we would like to give special thanks to Jeff Strully, Norman Kunc, and Michael Giangreco whose vision and dedication have inspired us all.

For their leadership, we thank Elizabeth Twomey, New Hampshire's Commissioner of Education, and Robert Kennedy, Director of the Division of Educational Improvement, New Hampshire Department of Education. Their

guidance allows our state to provide quality education for all students. Our thanks to our colleagues at the New Hampshire Division of Mental Health and Developmental Services and the Developmental Disabilities Council. They are strong proponents of inclusion and work vigorously to support all people to live rich lives in their communities.

Finally, we extend our deepest appreciation to the students, families, and educators who allowed us into their lives. Without their vision and commitment, high school inclusion would still be only a dream.

gements

The Names Behind The Faces

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Botany Class
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